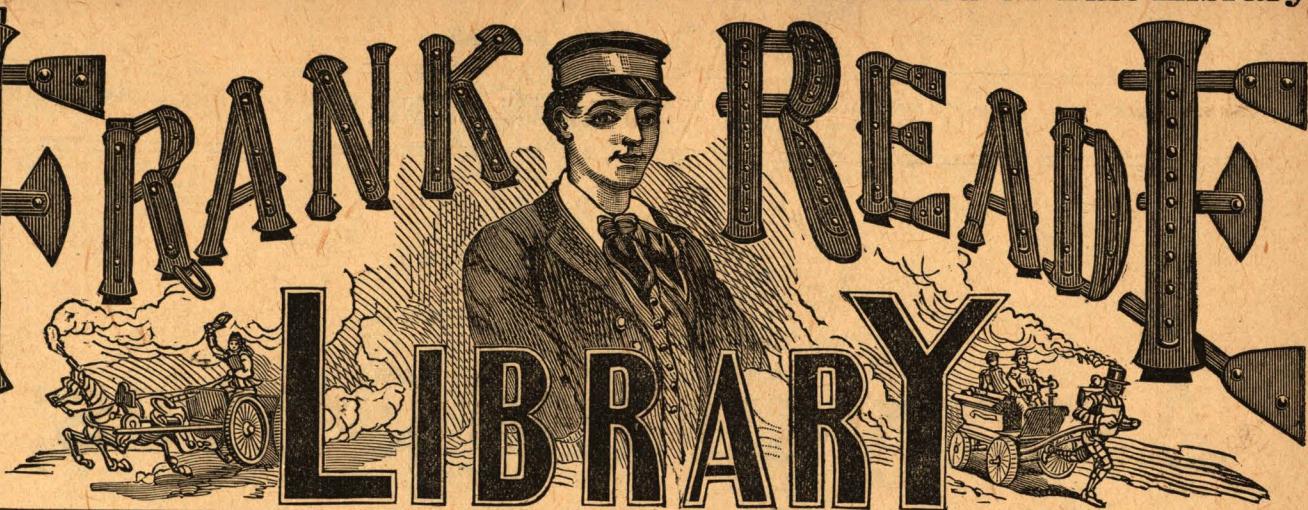


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ASTRAY IN THE SELVAS; OR, THE WILD EXPERIENCES OF FRANK READE, JR., BARNEY AND POMP, IN SOUTH AMERICA WITH THE ELECTRIC CAB.

By "NONAME."



In an instant Frank had slipped the lever back and threw a fresh cartridge into the breech. Then he took aim again. Crack! Once again the deadly bullet went to the mark. This time it spattered the reptile's brains.

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Astray in the Selvas;

OR,

The Wild Experiences of Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp, in South America With the Electric Cab.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "On the Great Meridian With Frank Frank Reade, Jr., in His New Air-Ship," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Greatest Flying Machine," "The Galleon's Gold; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Deep Sea Search," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST MEN.

ONE morning a famous New York daily newspaper contained the following item, which at once claimed the interest of thousands of people throughout the United States:

"Still no word has been received from the upper posts on the Amazon as to the fate of the missing explorers and scientists, Professor Malcom Goggles and Doctor Juan Ventura. Since they left the Yvarri Country to penetrate the Selvas of Brazil all trace of them has been lost."

"Much fear is expressed that death has overtaken them, that they have fallen victims to poisonous insects or reptiles, or perhaps some deadly fever, or even at the hands of the natives."

"The perils of penetrating the Selvas are hardly to be estimated. It is considered by Brazilians that the two explorers, with their resources and facilities, were foolhardy indeed. Relief parties have been sent up various tributaries of the great river, and daily word of a favorable sort is looked for."

Among the many people who read the above was a young man whose name was known the world over.

Frank Reade, Jr., the distinguished young inventor, was much impressed with the thrilling account.

He knew the two scientists personally as attaches of the American Academy of Sciences.

"That is too bad," he exclaimed. "They are too valuable men to lose. There ought to be some way to effect their rescue."

"Golly, Marse Frank," exclaimed a voice at his elbow; "I jes' been readin' dat berry same fing, an' sho's youse b'on dar am jes' one way dat dey kin be saved, an' dere am jes' one man kin do it!"

"And he—"

"Am yo'sef, sah."

"How can I save them, Pomp?"

The stocky little darky, scraping and bowing before Frank, showed his ivories and replied:

"Wif yo' new masheen, sah—de Electric Cab."

"The Electric Cab!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, that could hardly penetrate the dense Selvas of the Amazon. My dear sir, those are forests so dense in places that a squirrel can hardly squeeze its way through."

"I know dat, sah; but amn't dere lots ob ribbers dat run up in among den forests, sah?"

"Tributaries of the Amazon—yes, there are."

"Well, sah, de Electric Cab kin float in water as well as run on de lan', an' I done fink yo' kin fin' yo' way froo all right, sah."

Frank drew a chart from a desk and studied it for some moments.

Pomp meanwhile stood respectfully but eagerly by his chair.

"Let me see," said the young inventor, reflectively. "The Yvarri country is near the mouth of the Javari River, and in the heart of the

Selvas. It is well known that there are solid savannas or plains at intervals in the Selvas where we might travel with the Cab. As you say, we can ford or cross and even sail up streams with the Cab where the current is not too swift. Ah, what is that?"

The door of the office opened.

A comical-looking Irishman stood on the threshold. He had a shock of red hair and a mug which was as broad as it was good natured.

"Savin yure prisince, Misther Frank," exclaimed the Celt, ducking his head. "Shure, I've a card fer yez."

"Barney," exclaimed Frank, "let me see the card."

"Shure, it's a gintel, young man, sor, an' it's yesilf he wants badly to see!"

Frank glanced at the card.

Thus it read:

"Leslie Ventura, Washington, D. C."

"Show him in!" said Frank.

Barney ducked his head and vanished. Pomp did the same. They were old and tried colleagues of the young inventor's, and would stand by him through thick and thin.

The noon train had brought Leslie Ventura from Washington to Readestown.

It was not difficult for him to find the machine works of Frank Reade, Jr., and he had at once proceeded thither.

Leslie Ventura was tall, well formed and intellectual. He was the son of Professor Ventura, who with Malcom Goggles was supposed to be hopelessly lost in the South American Selvas.

His mission to Readestown was to him an all important one. It concerned the life of his father.

When therefore he entered the private office of Frank Reade, Jr., he was in a state of nervous excitement and eagerness.

He bowed ceremoniously and grasped hands with the young inventor. Each bent upon the other a keen searching glance, and from that moment they were friends.

"Mr. Reade, I believe?" said young Ventura, politely. "I am pleased to meet a gentleman whose fame has been so long known to me."

"The pleasure is mutual," said Frank, warmly; "pray, have a chair."

"I will be brief in stating my business," said Ventura. "Perhaps you have seen in the newspapers an account of the sad fate which has befallen my father, Doctor Ventura, and Professor Goggles in the wilds of Brazil?"

"They are supposed to be lost in the Selvas?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"A wild hope has sprung up in my bosom that perhaps you could help me."

"I help you?"

The two men exchanged glances.

"Yes."

"Indeed," said Frank, "if it is within my power, I am yours to command."

"I believe it is," declared Ventura, confidently. "You are the inventor of many wonderful vehicles. Perhaps we could find the lost men with your air-ship—"

"Wait," said Frank. "I have a better idea!"

"Indeed!" cried young Ventura, delightedly. "I believe we can find the lost men, if you agree—"

"I will promise nothing," said Frank, abruptly, "but I will say this, that I am deeply interested in this case, and will do all I can for you. My plan is to invade the Selvas with my new Electric Cab."

"Splendid!" cried Ventura, with shining eyes. "We will then be sure to succeed."

"You know that the perils of the Selvas are innumerable. There are deadly insects, reptiles, war-like natives and fatal fevers."

"Yes."

"In the Electric Cab we shall be exempt from all these perils. Its walls are of steel, and impervious to the passage of a bullet or a javelin. It is so arranged that the shutters can be closed, and the deadly swamp air can be treated chemically before we breathe it. In fact, the Electric Cab is in every way fitted for safe travel in a tropical clime."

"Good!" exclaimed young Ventura. "I shall leave all to your direction, Mr. Reade. Rest assured I will give you a large reward—"

"Not so," said Frank, quickly. "I shall positively decline to go with any such an understanding. I had intended to go to some unexplored part of the world with the Cab, and it may as well be the Selvas as anywhere."

"You are kind," said Ventura, with glistening eyes. "Rest assured, you will always have the gratitude of our family."

"That will be sufficient."

The young scientist arose to go; but at the door he paused.

"May I ask," he said, "how soon you will undertake the quest, Mr. Reade?"

"At once," replied Frank, "the Cab is so arranged that it can be packed in sections aboard a South American steamer. We will go direct to Para. From there I believe that I can get the machine transported by a river steamer to the mouth of the Rio Negro. There we must make our way into the Selvas as best we can."

Ventura trembled with eagerness and excitement.

"You will pardon me," he said, "but who will accompany you upon your trip?"

"My two faithful men, Barney and Pomp," said Frank; "I could not get along without them."

Ventura bowed.

"Then I shall see you in Para," he said, "I will follow on behind your Electric Cab with a picked company of natives."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, "why not come on board with us?"

"I think that it would be better for me to follow with a company of natives," said Ventura; "the cab will break the way for us, and we can be of some service scouting or making side trips where the cab could not penetrate."

"A very good idea," declared Frank, "I had not thought of that. Then you will go with us upon our steamer?"

"I shall go by an earlier one to Para. By the time you get there I shall have all equipments ready for the great search. God grant it may be successful. I have but one more favor to ask."

"And that—"

"You will not fail to meet me in Para. If you do not meet me there I shall go on alone!"

"I will meet you," said Frank. "My word is my bond!"

"I believe you. Au revoir."

"Au revoir!"

The door closed behind the young scientist. For somewhat Frank studied the chart before him.

He was at once thoroughly imbued with the new scheme.

"It promises rare adventure and plenty of sport," he muttered, "the Selvas of Brazil. Truly we could not find a better field. Now to make preparations and be off."

When Frank Reade, Jr.'s purpose was noised abroad it created great excitement all through the country. Developments were watched with the most intense of interest.

CHAPTER II.

UP THE AMAZON.

THE little South American city of Para, on the Para River, and properly at the mouth of the Amazon, is the depot for all the products of the great Amazon region and Northern Brazil.

One day a small fruiter from New York steamed into the harbor and made its way to the quays.

Upon its deck there were three passengers worthy of note. They were no other than Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp.

"Golly, Marse Frank," said the darky, wiping the perspiration from his face, "dis am a berry warm climate!"

"Bejabers, it's preparin' us fer phwat we'll have to cum to some day," declared Barney.

"Huh!" exclaimed Pomp. "Am yo' speakin' fo' yo'sef, chile, or fo' de rest ob us?"

"Shure yez needn't fret about that at all, at all," declared Barney. "It's not loikely yez will go to the same place as meself."

"I done fink it wud jes' be too warm fo' me," declared Pomp. "Don't keer 'bout bein' burned up in brimstone, yo' may be suah!"

"Tut, tut," said Frank, sharply. "You rascals will get into a quarrel yet. You had better drop the subject."

At this moment the captain of the steamer, a stocky little Brazilian, came up and said:

"Buenos Senor, there has come aboard a skipper of one of the river boats, who says he will take you and your cargo to the mouth of the Rio Negro for two hundred pesos."

"Just the man I want to see," said Frank. "Where is he?"

"Forward, sir."

Frank quickly made a bargain with the Amazon captain. Then the small steamer ran alongside the ocean vessel, and the Electric Cab, packed in sections, was transferred aboard the former.

While this was being done, another river steamer, named the Caballero, came steaming up.

On her deck stood a familiar figure.

It was Leslie Ventura.

In a few moments he was on board the ocean steamer and fairly embracing Frank Reade, Jr.

"You don't know how glad I am to see you!" he cried. "I have fifty brave fellows, all familiar with forest life, aboard the Caballero. They are Sequina natives and fighters."

"Good!" said Frank. "You will come aboard our steamer?"

"No. You will be quite crowded, and it is not safe to overload these river craft. I have chartered the Caballero for the distance to the Rio Negro!"

"Very well! Then you will keep along with us?"

"Oh, yes!"

It did not take long to transfer the Cab to the hold of the river steamer Jesinta. Then Frank, with Barney and Pomp, went aboard her.

It was not therefore made necessary to go ashore in Para.

Around the island of Joannes they steamed, and then entered the true mouth of the Amazon.

It was a curious sensation which came to the voyagers as they realized that they were about to sail several thousands of miles upon the bosom of the largest river in the world.

The sluggish current of the Amazon stretched as far as the eye could reach, at intervals broken with small tropical isles or shoals, covered with clumps of timber which had drifted down its mighty length.

For days the wheezy little steamers threaded their way through various channels.

At times they were required to make landings to procure wood, and then glimpses were had of great plantations which extended over the rich bottom lands.

All was new and strange and interesting to the voyagers.

But not one in the party but looked forward eagerly to the day when they should reach the Rio Negro and begin the great quest in earnest.

For fully a thousand miles up the great river there was much of a sameness which grew monotonous.

Then there came a change.

The river divided into various channels and each was narrow with deep and swiftly swirling current.

At times these channels would be overhung with dense foliage, drooping vines and a tangle of tree tops.

In these monkeys and paroquets gamboled and squawked. At times monstrous serpents glided down the current, and slid with sullen splash under the steamer's bow.

Once one of these full sixty feet long tried to come aboard.

For a time there was excitement aboard the steamer.

A sty, near the bow, contained a number of fat pigs, and these it was which had doubtless drawn the big snake aboard.

He went over the forward rail like a flash.

One of the crew made a blow at him with an ax but missed him. Then the snake's head went down into the sty.

When it came up its jaws held one of the squealing pigs. Another moment and it would have escaped with its prey.

But Barney who was on deck with his rifle, cried:

"Whurroo! luk out fer yerself!"

Then he took swift aim and fired.

The bullet struck the big snake full in its flat head. There was a convulsive lurch, the bow of the boat went down a little, and the huge reptile slid overboard.

There he floated down the stream on the tide, a quivering, dying mass.

A cheer went up from the crew at the success of this shot. Barney came in for congratulations.

Incidents of a thrilling sort were of almost daily occurrence while going through this part of the river.

But eventually the landing point at the mouth of the Rio Negro was reached.

Then followed the disembarkation. The party of natives under Leslie Ventura were landed easily.

No word was here gained of the fate of the missing explorers.

It was known that they were yet buried somewhere in the Selvas, and perhaps death itself had overtaken them.

The disembarking of the Electric Car was now the great matter of interest.

There was a small Indian village near, and the inhabitants of this came flocking down to the river.

The sections of the great machine were at last safely landed. Now the problem of putting them together was presented.

But Barney and Pomp were thorough mechanics and with the assistance of Frank Reade, Jr., the work went on successfully.

Within a day and a half the Electric Cab was made ready for its great trip into the Selvas.

As it stood completed the Electric Cab was a wonder. The natives gazed at it with amazement bordering upon superstitious fear and awe.

In shape the cab was symmetrical and well proportioned. The wheels and running gear were light yet powerful.

The wheels were tired with rubber and upon the hubs were great knives for the purpose of cutting a way through light brush or dense grass.

The deck of the vehicle was of steel and wood, with water-tight compartments, so that it might float in water. The superstructure was, forward, of plates of thinly rolled steel; and aft, of curtains of fine steel netting, bullet proof.

In the netting there were loopholes through which to fire upon a foe, for the Cab had been constructed for a defensive vehicle.

The roof of the superstructure or cabin was flat, with a hand rail about it.

There was a sort of dome with circular windows, and above it rose a small mast and flag.

Just forward on this roof was a powerful search-light, capable of throwing light two miles. Just under this was the pilot-house with plate glass windows and the steering gear, as well as the dynamos and electrical engines.

These latter were wonderful in design and power. They were operated by a storage system, which was a secret of Frank's.

On the forward platform there was a light pneumatic gun, capable of throwing a projectile of dynamite a great ways with fearful destructive power.

The interior of the cab was provided with bunks, with storerooms for the preservation of food and necessary ammunition.

Otherwise everything was arranged with an eye to practical use. The Electric Cab was designed for just such work as was now before it.

Barney and Pomp had placed the stores aboard the cab, and all was in readiness for the start.

For a few hundred miles the mighty forest was easily penetrated, as it was clear of undergrowth, and the machine could roll along easily under its mighty arches.

At length Frank cried:

"All ready! We ought to make fifty miles before dark."

"Our progress will be more slow," declared Leslie, "but we will meet you again in the upper Amazon."

"Ah!" exclaimed Frank; "then you are not going our way?"

"No!" replied young Ventura. "We shall strike up the Amazon in canoes. There will be some little fighting on the way for we shall, no doubt, meet with hostile Indians. But we shall hope to meet you again in a few days."

"I wish you luck," declared Frank, "and think on the whole your plan the best."

"By all means. You see we may meet the lost men on the river, whereas if we went with you we would surely miss them."

"An excellent plan," declared Frank. "I hope that we shall win success!"

"So do I!"

Farewells were spoken, and then Leslie and his men embarked in their canoes.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp stepped aboard the Electric Cab. Barney pressed the motor lever. The vehicle rolled ahead and the great journey into the heart of the Selvas was begun.

CHAPTER III.

IN A MIRE PIT—A CLOSE CALL.

"GOLLY fo' glory! Ise neber gwine to see home any mo', an' Marse Frank an' dat I'ishman. Boo, hoo! Ise a gone nigger, I is!" The shrill tremulous voice rose upon the murky air of the Brazilian swamp.

It came from the level of the ground veritably, for an observer might have seen a black, woolly head and shoulders just above the level of a black mire pit.

Unwittingly, Pomp, in quest of a rare pheasant, had walked into this quicksand.

In instant he was up to his shoulders, and immovable in the muck.

He was not ten yards from the current of the big river, and full three miles from the Electric Cab, which was in camp in the heart of the mighty forest wilds.

The time was mid-day.

For six weeks the Cab had threaded its way deeper and deeper into the Selvas.

There had been some few exciting events. But not until this moment had a serious mishap befall any member of the party.

In this time no sign had been seen of Ventura and his men.

In fact, he was waiting in reality upon this part of the Amazon, in the hopes that the young explorer would happen along.

But he had not come.

Pomp found himself in a terrible predicament.

In his fall his gun had been hurled yards away. He was thus unable to signal to his friends.

How long he could hold onto life in this precarious position he could not say.

Certainly not for long.

The pressure upon his chest was unbearable. It was crushing the wind out of him. Yet he was utterly unable to crawl out of the mire and struck senseless with the butt of a gun.

His friends as he well knew might search for him for weeks without finding him. It was an out-of-the-way place.

He shouted but his voice was only a piping treble. The pressure shut it off.

No wonder he groaned and cried out in the horror of despair.

"Oh, Massy Lordy! Massy Lordy! dis chile am done fo', fo' shuah!"

Tighter grew the pressure. His breath came in gasps. His head swam and he grew faint and dizzy.

Various flies buzzed about his head, and stung him to frenzy. But this was as nothing to a new danger which came upon him.

Suddenly there was a hoarse bellow from the river.

Pomp saw swimming in the current a huge alligator. It was coming directly toward him.

Its cold hungry eyes were fixed full upon him. The darky's very soul froze with awful horror.

"Oh, massy Lordy! Ise surely a gone coon," he groaned.

Indeed there seemed little doubt of this now. The alligator was making straight for Pomp.

It drew its slimy length out upon the reedy bank. Its great jaws opened and shut with an ominous snap.

It crawled straight toward the darky. Another moment and it would have finished the earthly career of Pomp.

But at the last moment succor came.

There was a sudden rustling in the bushes near. Then something bright flashed through the air.

The alligator gave a convulsive spring and a bellow of pain.

Then Pomp saw a powerful javelin protruding from its eye.

The creature's brain had been reached. It turned slowly upon its side and was dead.

Astonished as well as relieved, the darky turned his head to see who his deliverer was.

But in that instant he saw that he had been delivered from the frying pan only to fall into the fire.

From the copse there glided forth two of the most villainous looking Yvarri natives he had ever seen.

They were nearly naked, but carried the rude wooden shields and darts in use by the Brazilian natives. There was a devilish leer upon the face of each.

They came creeping up to Pomp on their hands and knees.

They chattered and laughed, and stared at him in an idiotic manner.

Then they spat in his face.

Pomp saw at once that they had rescued him from the alligator simply that they might make a victim of him themselves.

"Massy Lordy," he groaned; "dar am no help fo' dis chile."

Yet there was just one solitary ray of hope. Some one of his friends might happen along and save him. But the chance was remote.

The two Yvarri natives held a chattering consultation.

Then they procured a strong sapling near and placed it under his arms.

Each took hold, and with a marvelous exhibition of strength, literally hauled him out of the mud pit.

It was a relief to Pomp to get out of the mire, but he knew that his chances for life were not improved; yet he made an effort to compromise with his captors.

He indulged in all manner of sign talk.

He made them all sorts of promises; but he might as well have spared his breath.

For they had no effect upon the wretches at all.

They quickly bound Pomp with thongs made from a clinging vine peculiar to the region. Then they stood him up against a tree.

All the while they chattered and laughed like a couple of fiends, while the poor darky was wholly at his wit's ends.

The first act upon the torture programme decided upon by the fiends was now begun.

This consisted of throwing their javelins so that they might pin the tree all about the victim's head and body. Their aim was something marvelous for accuracy.

The long darts would strike so close to the darky that it seemed as if he could feel them graze the skin. At any moment he expected one of them to enter his body.

But the South American Indian is more than an adept at this sort of thing.

They were wonderfully accurate. Pomp was a plucky fellow, but had begun to abandon all hope.

"If only Marse Frank or dat I'ishman would jes' cum along now," he muttered, "I jes' reckon we wud make dem a bit sick."

After a time the natives tired of this sort of sport and made a move to vary the programme.

They drew long knives and approached the darky. What they intended to do Pomp never knew.

For at that moment a crack of a rifle went up on the air, and one of the natives fell upon his face. The other turned but was instantly struck senseless with the butt of a gun.

A tall, lithe form had leaped out of the undergrowth. A great cry of delight rang from Pomp's lips.

"Bress de Lor', it am Marse Frank," he cried, wildly. "Hoop-la! dis chile am all right now."

"Of course, you are!" cried Frank, "but how did you get into this scrape, Pomp? Why, you are all covered with mud."

"I know dat, honey," cried the delighted darky, "but I'se all right, jes' de same. Fell into a deep mud hole an' nigh got drowned. Dem natives dey jes' pulled me out, and dey was habbin' fun wif me when yo' cum up a' sabe his chile's life."

"Indeed, I am inclined to think that is so," declared Frank, "but are there any more of these chaps in the vicinity?"

"Don' kno', sah, but it mought be jes' as well fo' us to keep our eyes open, sah."

"So I think."

The words had hardly left Frank's lips when an astonishing thing occurred. Around a bend of the saw-grass which lined the river's bank there suddenly shot a canoe.

In it there were a dozen of the Amazon natives. All were armed and evidently upon the warpath.

"Quick!" exclaimed Frank, as he drew Pomp into the cover of the copse, "they must not see us!"

But if the natives had seen Frank and Pomp they did not offer them harm, for suddenly three of their number fell dead.

Long, keen javelins had transfixed their bodies.

And from another section of the saw-grass another canoe shot forth. The natives in this craft were dressed a trifle different and were evidently foes.

In an instant the two canoes were alongside and a tremendous fight followed.

The air was filled with the yells and cries of the combatants. It was lively work for a time.

But the current carried the combatants out of sight. How the struggle terminated Frank and Pomp never knew.

For the young inventor struck out through the forest, saying:

"Come, Pomp! We don't want to get mixed up in anything of that sort. Our safest way is to get back to the machine."

"Golly, Marse Frank, I jes' believe yo' am right!"

So back through the forest they made their way.

But as they drew near the spot where the Cab had been left a sudden uproar arose.

There was a confused sound of yelling voices, the crack of a rifle, and Frank cried:

"Mercy on us, Pomp, they've attacked Barney!"

Golly, yo' am right, sah!"

Forward they ran with all swiftness; but it was some little time before they came upon the scene.

Then it was seen that Frank's premise was correct. The Yvarri natives had made an attack upon the Cab.

Barney was holding them at bay with his Winchester.

Frank was hardly decided what it was best to do. The situation was one of most intense peril. There was no time to lose. Decision was needed now.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEFEAT OF THE NATIVES.

FRANK knew the peril of his position well. It would not do to get in the way of Barney's shots either.

At first he had half decided to open fire upon the natives and take the chances.

But sober second thought decided him upon another move.

He knew that Barney would sound the signal for his return. This consisted of a keen siren whistle.

Frank had one of these whistles in his pocket. He could, with it, establish a telegraphic code with Barney.

So he drew Pomp beyond the range of fire, and gave a shrill blast upon the whistle.

It was instantly answered by Barney. Then began the telegraphic system of talk.

"Can you hold your own?" asked Frank.

"Much as ever," replied the Celt. "How shall I get you aboard?"

"Run the machine straight ahead, and give the natives a shot from the electric gun."

"All right."

Barney obeyed the command given him to the very letter. The machine started ahead.

The natives, with yells, ran in front of it to block its progress. This was the Celt's chance.

He trained the pneumatic gun and pressed the electric spring. What followed was terrific.

There was a shock and a terrible roar. A burst of flame leaped up where the shell struck. The explosion leveled trees, tore up great heaps of soil, and engulfed half a score of the natives.

This was enough for them.

Terrified beyond measure, they fled.

Frank and Pomp availed themselves of the opportunity, and got aboard the machine. The escape had been close enough.

"Begorra," cried the Celt, "I thought fer shure it was the ind av yez, an' yez wud never cum back. It's glad I am to see yez."

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "yo' kin be suah we am glad enuff fo' to git back!"

"That is right," said Frank; "it seems that we have struck right into the midst of the Yvarri country."

"Be jabbers an' they mane to give us thrubble, too," said Barney.

"You are right," said Frank, "but we must be on our guard, and I think we will be all right. They are a treacherous and evil set."

"Did yez foind any soigns while yez war out?"

"Nothing," replied Frank; "if the two lost scientists were in this part of the country at all, they certainly left no evidence behind them."

"Be me sowl that's too bad! Shure, sor, it's afraid I am that nobody williver see them agin."

"Indeed, I am inclined to believe that myself. But I should like to see the party under Ventura come up the river. Perhaps they have learned something."

"Shure, sor, and it's about toime they were here, I'm thinkin'. We've been waitin' a long while."

"True enough!" agreed Frank, "but something may have happened to them; of course they must have encountered foes before this."

"Hark! do yez hear that?"

"Golly! It am firing!" cried Pomp, excitedly.

There was no mistaking the fact; the distinct sound of rifles could be heard.

At first it seemed as if they came from beyond the forest; but Frank knew better.

The river here took a long bend. They came from some point down its course.

Frank had but one thought.

He felt sure that it was the party of which Leslie Ventura was the captain.

They had engaged the Yvarri in battle; in that case they would doubtless need help.

He lost no further time.

"Get your Winchesters ready, Barney and Pomp!" he cried, "there is work for us!"

"A'right, sah!" cried Pomp, standing on his head as a preliminary.

"Begorra, we'll give the devils a taste av fun!" cried Barney, throwing a flip-flap.

While Frank was at the wheel and had set the Cab in motion, the two jokers were busy getting their weapons in readiness.

The Cab made its way as rapidly and as well as possible along the bank of the big river.

At times the surface was visible, at other times it was concealed by saw-grass or jungle.

But suddenly the Cab came upon a spot where the trees made a break, and the river was visible for a full mile.

And here a thrilling scene was spread to view.

A dozen light dugout canoes were floating in the current. Some of these were provided with screens or shields of wood and tough deer-hide.

Behind these screens the Sequina natives were crouched, sending their arrows and darts ashore.

While from the shore a perfect shower of missiles came.

The Yvarri had recognized the invaders and were determined to give them a hot reception.

The canoes kept on, while their occupants were quite well protected by the screens of wood. But the river narrowed at a point above and there the foe would mass to await them.

It was a thrilling time. The situation was not of the most encouraging for the river natives.

Frank saw Leslie Ventura among them and he could not refrain from sending up a shout.

At once Ventura turned.

He gave a wild cry of joy at sight of the cab. Then the canoes began to pull in that direction.

Barney and Pomp had opened fire with their Winchesters, but Frank trained the electric gun. He was determined to give the foes a settler.

One moment he sighted a gun, then he pulled the lever. There was a terrific roar upon the bank opposite, trees were torn up and many of the Yvarri were thrown into the river.

The electric gun was something which the natives could not understand. Its terrible death dealing powers quite awed them.

They retreated for a time. This enabled the Sequinas to gain the opposite bank in safety.

A truce was called if nothing more, and the Sequinas were enabled to house their canoes in the saw-grass.

Then Ventura came quickly up the bank and embraced Frank.

"Thank God for this meeting!" he cried, "have you got any clew?"

Frank shook his head slowly.

Ventura's face fell.

"I am sorry," he said. "I fear the worst. Ah, shall I never see my dear father again?"

"Let us hope for the best," said Frank, "the pursuit is not ended yet."

"You are right," declared Ventura, "and I shall not abandon it while there is a ray of hope."

"Good!"

"Now—have you any plan to propose?"

"I was about to ask you the same question," said Frank.

"Well," said Ventura slowly, "as near as I can learn, my father and Prof. Goggles penetrated as far as this into the selvas, if not further. So of course we must keep on."

"Very well," said Frank; "but I have an idea."

"Well!"

"These Yvarri natives of course know the fate of the two men. If we could only capture one of them and force him to confess—"

"Good! I thought of that once myself. In fact, we did cate-

chise an old warrior whom we captured. What do you think he said?"

"Well?"

"That both were dead."

There was a moment of silence.

Then Ventura said sharply:

"But I believe he lied. I will not give up my father until I have seen his body, dead or alive!"

"That is a proper sentiment," declared Frank. "Now let us lay out a plan of action. The mouth of the Japura is just above here."

"Yes."

"Well, by the time we get there, we ought to have obtained a clew. I will go around through the Selvas and you follow the river."

"And meet there?"

"Yes."

"At the mouth of the Japura?"

"Exactly."

"The first one there will wait for the other?"

"That is the idea!"

"It is a bargain. If we can only slide by yonder point of land, we can get away from this gang of Yvarri."

"I will drive them back with the electric gun, so that you can pass all safely."

"Good!"

The canoes of the Sequinas again shot into the water. Frank threw shell after shell into the saw-grass opposite.

This kept the foe back until Ventura had passed the narrow channel. Then the danger was over.

"Come," cried Frank, eagerly. "There is work before us, Barney and Pomp. Let us be off!"

The two jokers needed no second bidding.

They were ready at once, and the Electric Cab began again to thread its way through the mighty forest.

The impression of the travelers through the mightiest forest in the world cannot be expressed in words.

Beneath the black arches of trees fully a thousand years old and two hundred feet in height; huge mahogany, rosewood and rubber trees; dye woods and mighty plantains.

Huge trailing vines, larger than a man's thigh; great echoing, cavern like depths; places where the foliage was so dense that midnight reigned.

All these wonderful phenomena were to be observed.

Every moment some new feature was to be witnessed—some strange circumstance was revealed. Truly it was traveling in a wonder land.

Words or the power of pen is inadequate to describe the mighty scene in effective detail.

CHAPTER V.

BARNEY'S THRILLING EXPERIENCE.

It did not seem logical to Frank that so much distance should be covered and yet no trace of the two lost scientists.

It would seem as if they had ought to have left some slight trace behind them.

But none so far had been found. Yet Frank kept a keen lookout.

For several days the Electric Cab kept on.

Then as they were threading a copse of lignum vitae trees, a curious accident befell Barney.

The Celt was out on the forward deck smoking his pipe. It was his wont to talk much to himself when alone.

He was now mumbling and muttering at a great rate.

"Be jabers, the whole worruld knows that Oireland ought to be free! If I had me roights I'd be wan av the royal family, for shure, me father was a real Boru, and the Borus were the first kings av Oireland. Och, hone, but it's a dreadful pity! Wurra, wurra, but it was a black day fer Oireland when the English crost the Boyne wather. Lack-a-day! but I'm shure—"

"Whurroo!"

Barney's pipe fell and he gave a convulsive leap in the air. The cause of this was thrilling enough.

A great coiling form had shot down from the depths of a lump of thick foliage above.

A sinewy body had instantly encircled the Celt with a grip like that of an enormous vise.

He was lifted bodily from the deck of the cab, and suspended in mid-air. The machine went on and left him thus in the folds of an enormous python.

The serpent had seen Barney and at once selected him as a toothsome prey. But for a fortunate circumstance that hour would have been the Celt's last.

As good fortune had it Pomp was at the steering wheel and heard Barney's cry.

Instantly the darky glanced back and saw the situation with all its horrible force. There was Barney enwrapped in the crushing folds of the python.

There was but one thing to do, and Pomp lost no time in doing it.

He jammed the lever down and brought the Cab to an instant stop. Then he yelled:

"Golly, Marse Frank, come quick! dar am a dresful big snake as has got dat fishman."

In an instant Frank leaped up from his bunk where he had been taking a nap.

"A snake!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? Oh, by gracious! that is awful!"

Glancing back, through the steel netting, he saw Barney's position. One glance was enough.

Frank Reade, Jr., was one who was able to think and act all in the same moment.

He saw Barney's awful peril and simultaneously with that he acted. He grasped a rifle, swung wide the cabin door, and leaped to the ground.

It was not fifty yards to the spot where the Celt was struggling with the big snake.

The latter was striking Barney terrific blows with its toothless jaws; he was fast losing his senses.

The construction of the snake's coils were so powerful that it seemed as if the Celt must be crushed into a shapeless mass.

It required but a few seconds for Frank to cover that distance.

"Hold on, Barney," he cried, "don't give up! I'll save you!"

"Murther, but it's nigh done for I am!" groaned Barney.

Frank raised the rifle at almost point blank range and fired at the snake's head.

The bullet took effect.

It shattered the serpent's jaw. The big snake hissed savagely and beat its mighty tail furiously against the tree trunk.

In an instant Frank had slipped the lever back and threw a fresh cartridge into the breech. Then he took aim again.

Crack!

Once again the deadly bullet went to the mark. This time it spat-tered the reptile's brains.

Its mighty folds relaxed, and Barney fell to the ground. Frank pulled him out from under the snake's ponderous body, and cried:

"Saved!"

But the Celt had fainted. Frank quickly drew a flask from his pocket, and pressed a few drops between the Irishman's lips.

This had the desired effect. Barney opened his eyes at once, and at sight of Frank smiled and exclaimed:

"Shure, Misher Frank, I owe yez me loife. It's a close call it was."

"You're right, Barney," said Frank, with a shiver, as he glanced at the snake's enormous dimensions. "That is the biggest snake I ever saw."

With Barney's aid, Frank stretched the monster out and measured its length.

This was not less than sixty feet, and its jaws were almost large enough to take a man's head into them.

"Bejabers, I was niver more surprised in me loife!" cried Barney in relating the incident. "Shure, I was shmokin' me dudeen, when all av a suddint somethin' catched me up, an' I wuz havin' the gizzard squazied out av me. Och hone, but I niver want another dose!"

"I don't blame you," laughed Frank; "it was a close call. I'd like that fellow's skin."

Indeed, this seemed worth preserving.

It was of a beautiful brown and azure shade, and the scales glis-tened brilliantly.

"Bejabers, it won't take long to take it off!" declared Barney.

This was done. With keen knives Barney and Pomp quickly re-moved the skin of the snake.

Then the Electric Cab went again on its way.

But ever after that Barney, while on deck, regarded suspiciously every huge bunch of foliage or overhanging limb, keeping a keen lookout for snakes.

But snakes were among the least feared denizens of the Selvas.

There were poisonous spiders, lizards and flies, in immense num-bers.

It was always safest to look in one's boots in the morning before putting them on. At certain hours of the day in certain localities, the voyagers were obliged to wear thick netting over their faces and hands to guard against the sting of a deadly fly akin to the teetse or African curse, whose bite is death to cattle.

The sting of the Selvas fly, however, was rarely fatal, though it gave one a frenzy, similar almost to hydrophobia. It was much dreaded and certainly to be avoided.

As for spiders, centipedes and scorpions, they seldom came aboard the Cab.

Spiders of the tarantula variety sometimes hopped down on deck from foliage above.

This would be the occasion for a stampede. Everybody kept out of the monster's way until a plan could be devised to kill it.

Of course the voyagers were not always thus troubled.

There were vast tracts where such pests seemed to be unknown, and were not to be found.

Then a tract would be reached which would be literally alive with them.

At such times great precaution was necessary.

The climate was something which it was difficult to contend with. The days were hot to suffocation, and the nights reeking with damp-ness.

Miasma was plentiful, and Frank was obliged many times to almost hermetically seal the Cab at night to ward off the certain germs of fever.

But this was not always the case.

There were high and dry parts of the selvas, under magnificent eucalyptus trees, where the atmosphere was pure and wholesome.

I was always arranged, if possible, to camp in just such a place.

Wild beasts were plentiful and sometimes aggressive.

There were fierce jaguars, panthers, and a species of bear.

But the foe perhaps to be most feared was the peccary or wild hog.

This animal, fierce, strong and swift of foot, roamed in vast herds in the wilds.

When they took a notion to cut across country, as they often did, everything living in their path must escape or be consumed.

Jaguar, panther or bear was no match for their rending tusks. If a native heard them coming he called upon his deity for succor and climbed the nearest tree.

Once the machine met a drove of these wonderful animals. The effect was thrilling.

Frank saw them coming and retreated to the cabin with Barney and Pomp at his heels.

But of course the peccaries could do no harm to the cab. They surged past it, snapping harmlessly at its steel sides and gear.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Frank, when the fierce pack had passed. "I'm more than glad that I didn't meet them on foot."

"Be jabers I'm after thinkin' they wud make porridge av a man as quick as iver wan cud think av it."

"You are right, Barney," agreed Frank; "I would rather meet a gorilla."

"Golly! does yo' believe dar am any gorillas in dis paht ob de country?" asked Pomp, with wide open eyes.

"It is more than likely," said Frank; "does not Du Chaillu speak of a savage giant ape which is akin to the gorilla of Africa?"

"Be jabers I'll kape me distance, bad cess to thim," declared Barney. "Shure there's no luck in thim at all, at all."

Altogether there were perils enough in the Selvas to suit the adventurous tastes of the voyagers. They could find no fault.

The most thrilling of experiences yet lay before them. In fact within the hour momentous things were to occur.

The machine was bowling along at a goodly rate under the forest arches, when suddenly Barney cried:

"Be jabers, Misther Frank, I belave there's a house over there! Whoiver can be after livin' in it? Wud yez take a look?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE STONE TABLET.

FRANK glanced in the direction indicated by the Celt and gave a great start.

Sure enough, in the dank foliage to the right, some yards away he saw the rude structure of a bamboo cabin.

Instantly the Electric Cab was brought to a halt.

"It is a habitation, sure enough," cried Frank, with deep interest. Then he raised his voice:

"Hello, the house!"

No answer came back.

The Electric Cab ran a bit nearer. The dense foliage, however, prevented any clear view of the house.

Frank picked up his rifle.

"Come, Barney!" he said, "let us take a look over there. Pomp, you can remain here."

"A' right, sah!"

Barney also picked up his rifle and then followed Frank. They approached the bamboo hut.

Before they reached the threshold they knew it was deserted.

But Frank entered.

Upon the rude hearth there were ashes and cinders, the dead remains of a fire.

But it was evident that the place had not been used for some months, yet Frank felt sure that this was an important discovery.

For he believed that it had been the abiding place of the two scientists for a part of their sojourn in the Selvas. If this was so, then there was no reason why there should not be a clew found as to their present whereabouts or their fate.

This was searched for.

Plenty of evidence was found that this had been indeed their sojourning place.

There were remains of camp utensils and a rusted rifle; also a lot of discarded specimens.

"They certainly made their abode here for awhile," declared Frank. "If we could only tell where they went from here——"

"Golly, Marse Frank. Wha' am dis?"

Frank turned to a stone tablet which Pomp had taken down from a small shelf.

He saw that something was etched upon it. It was intelligible, also being in very good English, and read thus:

"To whom it may concern, or to the next visitor to this part of the world. We extend greeting: We, Juan Ventura and Malcom Gogles of America, have made this point our home for eleven months past.

"Here we have rendezvoused after our perilous trips into the interior in quest of geological and botanical specimens. But saying this we have touched only upon the smooth side of our experiences.

"They would fill a volume. We have been compelled to use all strategy to baffle treacherous natives, to combat fierce wild beasts and deadly reptiles.

"All this we have, however, hardened ourselves to. But the worst of our situation is that we do not know in what part of the Great Selvas we are.

"In other words, we are lost—hopelessly lost—and never expect to see home and friends again. God pity us!"

"We have decided to leave this place in another week. We shall strike out due west in the hope of reaching a tributary of the Amazon. If we succeed we may reach civilization again. If we fail, then we shall meet our fate as only men should. Our souls are God's, our bodies belong to Science."

Frank read the date at the foot of the etching.

"They have been gone from here fully a month," he said.

"Begorra, that's not so very long, sor," ventured Barney.

"Long enough!" declared Frank. "In that time they may have wandered so far away that we may never be able to find trace of them."

The etching was taken aboard the Electric Cab.

Then Frank set the course of the machine due west. He knew that he could only trust to luck and chance.

"If we do not find them alive," he said, "I hope to at least find their bones, and clear up the mystery of their disappearance."

The Electric Cab now, however, found it more difficult to proceed. The forest seemed to thicken so that it was almost impenetrable.

"Golly, Marse Frank," declared Pomp, "wha' am we gwine to do now? Jes' looks as if we're gwine to git stuck!"

"Not a bit of it," said Frank. "Put the blades on the wheels."

This was done.

The keen scythe-like blades were put upon the hubs of the Cab wheels. Then the machine went ahead.

The knives cut the undergrowth like cheese for awhile, and the Cab ran full twenty miles in this manner, leaving a broad road behind it.

Then the tall mahogany and eucalyptus trees began to thicken and close together, so that not an opening wide enough for the Cab could be found.

This was a dubious state of affairs. The party were finally compelled to come to a halt.

"On my word," exclaimed Frank. "I verily believe we are stuck."

"Begorra it looks that way, sor!" exclaimed Barney, scratching his head in a reflective manner.

Frank got out and made a little scout about the vicinity.

He disappeared in the dark depths of the forest.

Five—ten—fifteen minutes passed. Barney and Pomp meanwhile had improved the opportunity.

Barney had it in for Pomp for an old time grievance. He had been watching his chance for a good while.

Pomp was mixing up some dough for bread in that part of the cab which he used as a pantry. He was assiduously working the pastry mass with his fingers.

Barney came up behind and picking up a scoop of flour clapped it down over the darky's woolly head. The transition was wonderful.

Pomp was almost instantly transformed from a black man into a ghastly white object. The flour sifted into his ears, nose and eyes.

"Wheew—s-s-s-splash—gush—blew—ew! Wha' de debbil am dat? Hi dar. I see yo'—yo' no' count, I'ishman. Oh, I fix yo' fo' dat."

Barney was roaring with laughter. He was so convulsed that he did not try to flee from his wrathful friend.

"Hi—ha—hol!" roared the Celt. "Phwat a foine lukin' object yez are, to be shure. Ye're a whoite man fer onst, naygur!"

"By golly, I jes' fix yo', honey," yelled Pomp, lowering his head. "Cl'ar de track, dar chile!"

He made a blind dash for the Celt.

Had he struck him at that pace, Barney would have felt a trifle sore. But the Celt collected his scattered wits enough to act.

He dodged aside, and Pomp's head struck the steel frame work or standard of the netting.

An ordinary mortal would have been instantly killed, or at least deprived of his senses.

But not so Pomp.

His head was endowed with the proverbial hardness, and though he winced with the rebound, he shook himself like a ducked cat and started for Barney again.

But the Celt ran screaming to the rear door of the Cab and leaped out.

Pomp did not follow him.

He knew that it was against orders for all to leave the Cab at once, so he contented himself with standing in the doorway and shaking his fist at the impudent Celt.

"Golly, yo' don' dare to cum abo'd dis waggin!" he cried, threateningly. "I git squar with yo', yo' no' count, good fer nuffin, way down I'ishman!"

"Go wash yer face, yez bloomin' beauty," roared Barney; "it's a foine subjick yez wud make now fer a picture."

Pomp was almost frantic in his desire to leave the Cab and pursue the Irishman.

But he remembered his duty and wisely refrained.

Barney sat down on a stump and mimicked and mocked the darky until after a time Pomp tired of it and went back to his work.

The shades of evening had begun to fall.

Not until this moment had either thought of Frank. He had been absent fully an hour.

Barney sprung up with a sudden sharp cry.

"Begorra, naygur!" he cried. "Whatever has cum to Misther Frank?"

Pomp gave a start.

"Dat am a fac!" he exclaimed; "he hab been gone a long time."

"Be jabers somethin' has happened to him!"

The two jokers stood looking blankly at each other.

Forgotten was all else at that moment. Each was certain that their master was in trouble.

Barney raised his voice and shouted loudly.

But no answer came back.

The situation now assumed an appalling aspect. What was to be done? What had really befallen Frank?

Had he strayed too far and lost his way, or had some deadly peril beset him?

In either case it was necessary to at once take active measures. No time was lost.

Barney sprang aboard and secured a rifle. Then he said:

"You jist stay here, naygur, an' I'll go lukin' fer him. Shure, I'm afraid at the worst."

"A'right, Pish! If yo' need help jes' fire yo' rifle."

"I'll do it."

Barney left the cab in hot haste. He at once struck out into the deep woods.

He shouted loudly for Frank, but no answer came back. He was now positive that harm had come to the young inventor.

Darkness began to settle down thick and fast.

"Begorra," exclaimed the Celt, "I've no lookin' fer this mesilf."

Every shadow assumed the form of some horrible monster. Barney was not above a bit of superstition, and his nerves began to quake.

After a few moments' more of futile quest he decided to return to the Electric Cab.

If harm had befallen Frank there was certainly nothing that he could do in that pitchy darkness which would be of avail.

So he turned about in his course.

But he was now confronted by a new problem.

Everything looked different in the darkness, and he was unable to distinguish any familiar object. After a futile tour in quest of the Cab he shouted to Pomp.

Then he fired his rifle. But the signal agreed upon did not come back.

"Begorra, that's quare," muttered the Celt. "Shure it's afraid I am that I've strayed away mesilf."

Again and again he fired his rifle. No answer came. The awful truth was forced upon him that he was lost in the selvas.

CHAPTER VII.

A NIGHT IN THE SELVAS.

BUT what of Frank Reade, Jr.?

The young inventor had at once penetrated deep into the forest without any thought, but that he might retrace his steps with ease.

As he went on, he heard a distant thunderous roar.

"What is that?" he muttered.

He listened for somewhat intently and then said with conviction: "It is the roar of a cataract. The Amazon or a branch must be due ahead."

With this reflection a desire came upon him to pay the big river a visit.

So he kept on without a thought of the lateness of the hour or the possibility of not being able to get back.

And as he progressed the roaring sound became fainter. He finally paused.

"That is curious!" he muttered. "Can I be going in the wrong direction?"

With this idea he again changed his course. And here was where he made another mistake.

In a little while he discovered that he was hopelessly lost.

He was chagrined as well as disappointed and alarmed.

He knew that to spend a night in those terrible wilds would be almost certain to mean the termination of his career.

Darkness was falling rapidly.

He fired his rifle and shouted.

But the denseness of the foliage deadened the sound. No reply came back.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "here is a predicament. What shall I do?"

There seemed no other alternative but to camp.

When daylight should come again then he would try and get his bearings and find his way out of this dilemma.

He could hear the distant howling of beasts of prey and knew that he would be an easy victim in the darkness of the night.

At first it occurred to him to climb a tree. Then he remembered that he would be no safer, as many wild animals in the Selvas could climb trees.

But one thing seemed at hand for a safeguard. He knew that all beasts are afraid of fire.

He would build a large fire, and by encompassing himself with such, he could keep the animals at bay.

Accordingly, he began hastily to collect all the dry wood and debris in the vicinity.

There was no time to lose.

He soon, however, had a great heap of it about him. Arranging some of the material in a semi-circle, he lit it.

In a few moments he had quite a good camp-fire.

It also carried away the deadly dampness of the atmosphere, and insured an immunity from the dangers of miasma.

Darkness now fell with a fearful thickness upon the great forest.

It was as impenetrable as one could imagine. Frank could see nothing beyond the range of the firelight.

His precautions were soon proved none too effective.

The darkness speedily began to blaze with glistening eyeballs. Snapping and snarling beasts hung about in the underbrush.

Frank picked up a burning brand and flung it at them.

There was a yowling and a rush into the deep brush. Then he saw the mistake he had made.

For the fire instantly ran through the underbrush, and began to play up the trunk of a mahogany tree.

"Goodness!" ejaculated the young inventor, "that will set the woods on fire!"

Such a contingency he knew might be a fated one, especially if the fire took a course toward the Electric Cab.

So acting on the impulse of the moment, he sprang up and began to trample it out.

He succeeded in this, but stood for a moment outside the circle of his camp fire.

The next instant there was a snarling cry, and a dark body shot toward him from the foliage above.

Frank dodged just in time.

The assailant passed over him and struck the ground on the other side of him.

There it crouched.

It was a panther.

The creature's eyes were like balls of fire. It was between Frank and the fire.

For a moment the young inventor was completely nonplussed.

What should he do?

Instinctively he drew a knife from his girdle. It was the only weapon at hand.

The panther made another spring. Frank met it with outstretched arm and knife.

The steel pierced the animal's throat. There was a wild clawing and scrambling, and Frank dodged to one side and leaped back into the fire-lit circle.

The panther went tumbling and screaming away into the bushes.

There were a few livid scratches upon Frank's arm, but otherwise he was unharmed.

It was a daring and brainy move. Any other might have cost him his life.

Frank now kept closely to the circle of fire-light.

He could not sleep.

His nerves were all a tingle and he waited anxiously the coming of day. He wondered what Barney and Pomp were doing.

Were they in quest of him?

If so, then he wondered if they had left the Cab, or simply awaited his return, or the coming of day.

"They will be sensible if they await the latter," he muttered.

Then he was rewarded with a startling surprise.

In the distance through the woods—could he believe his senses—he saw another fire.

It glowed and gleamed with great brilliancy. He even fancied he saw a form moving before it.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it must be that these woods hold another camper!"

But who was he?

Frank thought of the possibility of the two scientists turning up just now.

But he dismissed this theory.

"No," he muttered; "it is nothing of the kind. But I mean to find out who it is."

How to do this was for a moment a question.

Of course it was out of the question to try to cross that intervening distance.

But Frank held his rifle in the air and fired it.

There was a moment's pause, and then—

Crack!

The answer came back.

"Hello!" shouted Frank. "Who are you?"

"I'm mesilf. Who the devil be you?"

Frank gave a shout of joyous laughter. He dropped his rifle.

"It is Barney!" he cried. "Bless his faithful soul! Of course he came out to look for me."

"Then he shouted again:

"Is that you, Barney?"

"Mither av Moses, it's Misher Frank himslef!"

"That's just who it is, Barney!" cried Frank; "but how came you over there?"

"Shure it's lookin' fer you I've been, and the naygur's shtayin' wid the Cab all the whoile."

"Good!" cried Frank. "You are a trump, Barney. Where is the Cab from here?"

"Shure devil a bit do I know, sor. It's lost I've bin fer the last six hours."

"Lost!" cried Frank in dismay. "Do you mean to say that you don't know the way back to the Cab?"

"That's it exactly, sor."

"Mercy on us, the situation is worse than I thought! Barney, we are doomed!"

"Shure don't say that, sor. Wait until day comes."

"You are right; we will wait for day. But we cannot join each other just now."

"Divil a bit, sor. The wild bugaboos wud ate us up."

"All right! Keep up your courage and be patient. Day will soon come!"

"I'll be sure to do that, sor!"

From time to time through the night they conversed thus. It did seem as if morning would never come.

But it came at length and the wild beasts disappeared with the first appearance of the sun.

Then they set out for the eastward in quest of the Cab for Frank felt sure that they would find it in that direction.

The sun was high in the heavens when suddenly they came out into a cut road through the forest.

"Hurrah!" cried Frank. "We have struck it at last. This road was made by the knives of the Cab."

"Yez are roight, sor!" cried Barney. "but phwere is the Cab?"

This was a pertinent question, for in the spot where they had left it in Pomp's care there was nothing. The Cab was gone!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NATIVE SETTLEMENT.

FOR a moment this astounding fact rather disconcerted the two lost men.

Then Frank cried:

"Never mind. We can easily track it."

This seemed true, for the wheels of the Cab left their marks quite plainly.

Frank and Barney proceeded to follow the trail. For miles through the forest they followed it.

Suddenly it occurred to Frank to fire a signal gun.

"It is queer what Pomp made off for," he said.

"Shure it is dast he must have been, sor. I don't see phwat he was iver thinking of."

Then Frank fired the rifle.

Its echoes died out. The two travelers waited a few moments for a reply.

It seemed for a time unlikely to come. But just as they were about to resume their way it came.

A distant report it was.

"Forward!" cried Frank. "That will stop him!"

They pressed on.

"It seems queer to me," said Frank, again, "how the machine found a way through here."

"Begorra, it luks as if we was drawing near some koind of wather," declared Barney.

Indeed, Frank was ready to share this same opinion. The land began to sink, and sawgrass appeared in patches.

Then suddenly voices were heard just ahead. There was no mistaking the fact.

Frank paused in astonishment.

"What the deuce does that mean?" he exclaimed. "You left Pomp alone, did you not?"

"Shure, I did, sor!"

"Well, there are others near here. Let us solve this mystery."

The next moment a solution was afforded. As they pressed through a section of the jungle, they came upon a striking scene.

There was the Electric Cab to be sure. Pomp stood on the forward platform.

He was holding confab with a white man who had a score of natives at his back. A lot of canoes were drawn up on the shore.

It was Leslie Ventura and his men.

At that moment Pomp caught sight of Frank and Barney.

He let out a yell of delight fit to crack one's ear-drums and screamed:

"Golly, golly! dar dey am now, all safe an' well! Praise de Lor' dey am all safe!"

"Yes, you black rascal," said Frank; "but what are you doing away out here?"

"Don't censure him, Mr. Reade," said Leslie; "he heard our signal guns and thought they were yours."

"Dat am true, Marse Frank."

"Oh, that is different," said Frank, his face clearing. "Well, Ventura, I am glad to see you."

"The same to you."

"Have you had luck?"

"None at all."

"Have not found a clew?"

"Not one!"

"Well, I have!"

Leslie gave a cry of joy.

"What is it?" he asked, eagerly.

"Come aboard and I'll show you!"

Leslie followed Frank aboard the Cab. Then the slab of stone was brought out.

The etching was read and excited Leslie muchly.

"So they were in the vicinity not a month ago," he cried. "Ah,

I am sure we shall find them alive!"

"Do not be too sure," admonished Frank; "they could die many times in a month."

"Ah, but I accept your discovery as unbounded proof that they are alive! It is the latest news anybody has of them."

"That is true," agreed Frank.

"But only think of their position," said Leslie. "Astray in the Selvas! You have just had a chance to realize what that means."

"Indeed we have," agreed Frank, "the chances against a man's life in this country are greater than in any other part of the world that I have ever been in."

"Bejabers, it's enough fer the loikes av me," averred Barney.

"We have had rare luck thus far," declared Leslie, "but what move had you decided upon, Mr. Reade?"

"I was making my way due west in pursuit of the two lost men," replied Frank.

"And they were making for the Amazon?"

"So it seems."

"Well," said Leslie, "I am afraid they did not reach it, or we should have met them coming up."

"By the way," asked Frank, "is the Amazon to the west of us?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I thought yesterday while in the forest that I heard a distant roaring of waters."

"No doubt you did. We made portage around a series of heavy rapids back here a few miles."

Frank was thoughtful.

"If they were making westward for the Amazon," he said, "they must have entered the very woods that I was lost in."

"No doubt they did," said Leslie.

"In that case, they either pressed on and reached the Amazon or else they got lost just as I did."

"Exactly! It was probably the latter. You can appreciate how easy it would be."

"Indeed, I can."

"So I am of the opinion that they are still lost somewhere in the Selvas. We may run across them at any moment, and again we may never run across them."

"We can at least try," said Frank, courageously.

"True. Now what move have you to propose, Mr. Reade?"

"Let us go on as we have in the past."

"That is, we will stick to the water in our canoes, and you will go overland."

"Yes."

"There can be no better plan. Above here we shall meet a friendly tribe of Indians. We will perhaps learn some truth from them."

"I hope so."

They shook hands, and then the Sequinas once more took to their canoes.

They were soon lost to sight in the saw-grass.

Then Frank turned to Barney and Pomp.

"Well, friends," he said, "fortune has not used us so very unkindly after all. We have at least escaped with our lives."

"Bejabers, Misher Frank, it's mesilf as is well satisfied," declared Barney.

"So am I," agreed Frank; "but let us waste no time. Perhaps when we reach these friendly natives we shall succeed in learning something of importance."

The Electric Cab was turned about, and retraced its way for some miles.

Ventura had given Frank the line of the Amazon at this point, and with the aid of his compass Frank made a course.

This enabled him to skirt the impenetrable forest and leave it behind.

The woods were reasonably clear now for some miles.

It was late in the day when the machine suddenly burst into a clearing.

A great cry went up.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "we hab found somebody in dese parts af tah all!"

It was the native settlement spoken of by Ventura.

These natives really proved friendly. They made a living shipping rubber down the current to the Portuguese traders far below.

The chief of the tribe, a venerable old warrior, came out to meet his distinguished visitors.

He addressed them in a smattering of Spanish.

As Frank was an accomplished linguist, he had no trouble in opening a comprehensive conversation with the old fellow.

The natives brought jars of maize and wild guavas for the travelers. Also they produced the honey of wild bees and some curious whortleberries, unlike any ever seen before by the voyagers.

The flesh of wild beasts, or any living animal or creature they would not touch. They were strictly vegetarians.

Frank learned that Ventura and his men had not yet arrived.

He also learned that the two white savants had visited the village, but had gone on through the forest.

"Then they did not take to the Amazon?" asked Frank.

"No, senor!" replied the chief.

This settled a great problem in Frank's mind.

He knew at once that he and not Leslie was upon the right track. Yet it seemed strange that the two men should at this point have taken to the interior again.

"It seems queer!" muttered Frank. "Well, perhaps some botanical or geological aim caused them to change their plans."

"That was no doubt it!" he continued, "let us keep on. I think we will find them yet."

Then he asked Savoyan the chief if there were any in his tribe who could track the lost men through the Selvas.

But Savoyan shook his head and replied:

"Great waters, much swamp over there. White men go in there never come out. Scarlet nega kill quick."

Frank had been told of the scarlet nega. It was a spider as large as one's hand, and it infested certain sections of the Selvas.

It had the reputed power of being able to outrun a wolf, and its bite

was frightfully poisonous. Moreover, they would instantly attack a man on sight.

Many luckless natives in hunting had run upon the home of the scarlet nega and paid for it with their lives.

It was considered almost certain death to meet one of these lords of the jungle.

Had Ventura and Goggles fallen victims to this awful scourge of the Selvas?

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCARLET NEGA.

HAD Frank been afloat he might have hesitated going further after the assurances of the native chief of the dangers in store.

But he knew that they could find seclusion in the Electric Cab, and that no such foe could ever penetrate to them.

"Come, Barney and Pomp," he cried; "we will go ahead. The scarlet nega or any other fiend shall not terrify us."

"Yo' am right, Marse Frank," cried Pomp. "We'se wid yo', sah, suah'nuff. We ain't afraid."

"Divil a bit!" cried Barney. "Shure, av yez kape the snakes out of it I'm all roight."

"Well, let us be off."

Savoyan, the chief, was presented with a few trinkets. Then the party went on.

Leaving the native settlement behind, the cab had soon entered a dense jungle country.

In spots the marsh was too wet for the machine to proceed safely. At such times a detour was always made.

But the party made rapid progress on the whole.

For several days they cut their way through jungle grass, forded streams, ran under forest arches, and across quaking baggy ground.

Then one day Barney cried:

"Shure, Misther Frank, it's open country we're aither comin' to." This was seen to be a fact.

A rugged series of rocky hills arose right in their path.

The sides of these hills were covered with dense trailing vines. They ran over the face of great precipice and cliff, mingled with the heaps of bowlders and gave a wild aspect to everything.

The machine moved along to the very base of these hills. Then as the voyagers were at one of the windows an astounding sight was beheld.

There lay the Amazon to their right. It was a wide and placid stream at this point.

Alligators basked upon its banks and wild herons piped in the saw-grass. A wilder, bleaker spot was never seen.

"On my word," exclaimed Frank, "I should think I was in another planet!"

"Begorra, it's loike no other part of the world," cried Barney.

"There is the Amazon," cried Frank; "if we were on top of that cliff we could see miles down its course. I wonder if young Ventura is in sight?"

"It's not sich a great climb up there," said Barney.

"You are right," agreed Frank; "I believe I'll undertake it."

"Yez are not afraid, sor?"

"Of course not."

"Better let me go, sor."

"Why?"

"Shure, sor, me loife is not so valuable as yours."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Frank, "what great risk should there be to it anyway?"

"Shure, sor, yez have forgotten all about them big red spiders."

Frank laughed hilariously.

"Oh, you mean the scarlet nega," he cried. "Well, let me tell you that I don't believe such a thing ever existed. It is all a myth. Here goes!"

Over the rail Frank leaped. He carried his gun and other weapons. He quickly crept over the dense vines to the naked wall of the cliff.

Then he paused.

Something caught his gaze.

His hair stood on end.

If he had been facing a wild tiger, he could not have been more terrified. His heart stood still.

Out of a crevice in the cliff, a curious-looking object crept.

It was crimson in hue. Moreover, it was a huge spider, fully the size of a man's hand.

"The scarlet nega?" gasped Frank. "It is no myth."

There, against the jutting rock, lay the awful monster. Frank had no command of his senses.

Meanwhile, the nega seemed to regard him in a most attentive manner. Then it slid forward like a ball on a greased plank.

"Heavens!" gasped the young inventor, "it is really coming for me!"

Forgotten were his weapons at the moment. Frank thought only of flight, and he was a brave man, too.

But the bravest and strongest flinch before the nega.

They are warranted in it.

That hideous crawling scarlet form is devilish in its make up. It suggests death in a horrible form. It is easier to look the rattle-snake or cobra in the eye than to face that awful, monstrous scarlet spider.

With a yell Frank started for the Electric Cab.

He needed all his strength and speed. The nega came down the slope like chain lightning.

It gained upon Frank, and it was certain that the young inventor was bound to be overtaken before he should reach the Cab.

Already he could, in fancy, feel the hideous form mounting his shoulders—experience the horrid pang of the creature's deadly bite.

It was like a strange awful dream. As he ran madly on, it seemed to him that he was in a dreadful nightmare.

He dared not look over his shoulders. He looked only ahead, and saw the rail of the cab before him.

Would he reach it?

It seemed as if he heard a peculiar hiss right at his heels. Then his foot caught in the vines and he fell.

But just at that critical moment, when death in a horrid form was upon him, the sharp crack of a rifle broke the air.

"Whurro, Misther Frank, I've killed it! Cum on, quick, fer yer loife, fer there's more coming!"

Frank needed no second bidding.

In an instant he was upon his feet. Then he plunged on and reached the rail of the Cab.

Barney and Pomp pulled him aboard. Into the vehicle they went and closed the door behind them.

Frank was for a moment faint and sick, but quickly recovered himself.

Barney pressed a draught of brandy between his lips and he recovered.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, with a shudder, "that old chief told the truth, didn't he? I'd rather face anything on earth than those awful spiders."

"Begorra so wud I, bad cess to them!" cried Barney. "Shure it's awful crathers they are."

"Golly! de Pishman he jes' fired in time," declared Pomp.

Barney had fired in time and with marvelous accuracy of aim. The bullet had terminated the existence of the nega instantly.

But the scene outside was now a thrilling one.

It seemed as if the vicinity fairly swarmed with the awful spiders. They came forth from all sorts of nooks and crannies, from crevices in the cliffs, and from beneath the trailing vines.

What was more, they seemed to be fairly bristling with fury and a voracious appetite.

They swarmed down upon the deck of the Cab, crawled over the netting seeking an entrance, and glowering upon the inmates with their glassy, fiendish eyes.

"Mercy on us!" cried Frank. "What a meal they'd make of a man?"

"Yez are roight," declared Barney. "I'd loike to get at the omadhouns and make a blow at them!"

"I think the best thing we can do is to get out of this vicinity," declared Frank, "the sight of the monsters makes me ill. I'd rather be in a den of snakes."

"All roight, sor!" declared Barney, "shall we go ahead, sor?"

"Yes!" replied Frank, "push on around these hills. I believe that they are the home of the negas, and that we shall not find them anywhere else."

"All roight, sor!"

Barney started the machine ahead. The result was curious.

The huge spiders clung to the netting and the wheels. Some were crushed beneath the latter.

Barney ran the Cab ahead for some distance.

They had partly skirted the hills and had reached a bare sandy plain, just beyond where Barney pulled up the machine in horror.

"Mither av Moses!" he gasped, "did yez iver see the loikes?"

The scene which the adventurers beheld was indeed a horrible one. The plain was fairly strewn with whitening bones.

There were disconnected skeletons of beasts and birds, and a number of human skulls were seen.

This was the feeding ground of the deadly negas.

Woe to the luckless living creature which fell within their territory. Lying in hiding they awaited the coming of a victim, and when satisfied that he was within their clutches, his career was quickly terminated.

That the negas fed upon flesh was now certain.

The adventurers gazed upon the scene spell bound.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Frank. "What a narrow escape I had. Another time I could not have gone half so far without meeting death."

"Begorra, yez were more than lucky," declared Barney. "Shure, it's thanks to the Howly Virgin we should be aither givin'."

"Massy sakes!" screamed Pomp. "Jes' look dere!"

The exclamation was well warranted.

The others looked in the direction indicated by the darky, and were spellbound.

Full into the clearing a young wood deer had bounded.

It threw up its dainty head at sight of the cab and sniffed the air. Then it set out across the clearing at a sharp trot.

It leaped into the network of vines, and essayed to climb the hill-side.

Luckless creature!

With the speed of the wind the scarlet negas swarmed from their coverts.

In less time than it takes to tell it, the deer was bitten in a hundred places.

It sank upon its knees with an almost human like cry.

Barney and Pomp were unable to bear the sight and opened fire on the spiders.

But their bullets had little effect. The spiders were legion. They fairly swarmed over the unfortunate deer.

Nothing could be seen of it as the huge spiders went on with their feast. When one was glutted another was ready to take its place. And thus the horrid orgies went on. Frank could stand it no longer.

"By Jove, I'll try and kill a few of them!" he cried.

He went forward to the electric gun.

This could be worked from the pilot house without the necessity of exposing oneself.

Frank sent an explosive bomb directly into the horrid squirming heap. The effect was dreadful.

The air to a height of twenty feet was filled with debris and a hole large enough to bury the carcass of the deer was blown into the hill-side.

Into this Frank threw another bomb. Hundreds of the negas were slaughtered. And yet as fast as they were killed others appeared to occupy their places.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the young inventor, "did you ever see the beat of that? It would take tons of dynamite to wipe them all out!"

Seeing the folly of thus wasting his shells, Frank desisted in firing.

"Let us get out of this place as quickly as possible," he said. "I think I shall have a fit if I stay here longer."

So Barney sent the machine ahead.

They had crossed the bone strewn clearing, and had reached the edge of the selvas again when suddenly Barney brought the Cab again to a stop.

"Howly murther!" he exclaimed, "wud yez luk at that?"

Under the shade of a eucalyptus was the full length skeleton of a man. Hard by was another.

What, however, had caused Barney to halt was an astonishing fact.

Close by lay the cork helmet of a civilized man. No native wore a hat of this description.

Also there was a cloak of good woolen cloth and a rifle with a broken stock.

"Shure, sor, thim war white min," declared Barney. Then he exchanged glances with Frank.

The same thought was in the mind of each. Both were thinking of the lost explorers.

"Run nearer," said Frank; "I am going to risk recovering that gun."

Barney obeyed.

There seemed to be none of the red spiders in the near vicinity. Frank ventured to emerge on deck, and leaping over the rail picked up the rifle.

He was aboard again instantly. He examined the stock. Upon it was a name cut in the wood.

"Malcom Goggles."

For a moment all three explorers were silent. It was a painful moment.

Then Frank said:

"The question is settled forever. There is no need of looking further. These are the remains of the lost men and their end was a fearful one indeed."

CHAPTER X.

DOWN THE RIVER.

WORDS can hardly express the sensations experienced by the three adventurers. It was indeed a fearful termination of the career of the lost explorers.

"Begorra, that's hard luck fer thim," averred Barney.

"Golly, dey ought to hab kept away frum dis place," said Pomp.

"They were probably as unsuspecting of danger as we were," said Frank, "but I feel sorry for Leslie; he will feel the blow."

"Shure it's a pity," said Barney, "an' there's no way to dacintly bury thim."

"It would hardly be safe," said Frank.

"Den I fink we mought jes' as well turn about an' go back," said Pomp.

"We must find Leslie first," said Frank, "then we will go back down the Amazon. I have seen enough of the Selvas."

This was the sentiment of all. A gloom fell upon them.

Frank turned the head of the machine about.

He ran it toward the bank of the Amazon. When the water's edge was reached he kept on.

"Whar am yo' gwine, Marse Frank?" cried Pomp, in alarm.

"Have no fear," replied the young inventor, "I am going to trust to the current a little ways. We can drift down and meet Ventura easier than in any other way."

"Begorra, that's thru."

"Throw out the paddles and the steering gear!" cried Frank.

This was quickly done.

The Electric Cab floated upon the bosom of the Amazon with ease. The paddles which flew out from the wheels gave her impetus.

Pomp was at the long tiller which was projected from the rear end of the vehicle.

Down in the current the Cab made its way steadily.

It was only necessary to keep in the channel and look out for snags and all would be safe.

Down the stream the vehicle went. At this point the Amazon was a vast sea, between walls of jungle and saw-grass.

All manner of water fowl were in the reeds and dipped into the water. Upon reaches of bog, alligators basked in the heat.

Great fields of water lettuce and aquatic plants of every kind, at times filled the bends and still pools of the mighty stream.

Beyond the banks, the giant trees of the Selvas rose far into the sky. It was a scene which baffles any attempt at adequate description.

"On my word," cried Frank, "this is certainly the wildest part of the earth."

"Begorra, it will always remain so, I'm thinkin'," declared Barney.

"Shure, nobody cud ever live in such a place."

"Ah, I don't know about that," said Frank. "Civilization will do a great deal. Some day, perhaps, these forests will be cut away, for the wood is all very valuable. Then the soil being rich, will be utilized for plantations and what crops it will raise. Ah, indeed it is not at all unlikely that some day this region may be thickly populated."

"Begorra, I'd rayther have the ould United Sthates."

"Of course in these days. But even in the States you will find that it is growing harder every year to raise profitable crops, and that merciless competition and over production is the bane of the people."

This was going too deep for Barney, who contented himself with saying:

"Shure, sor, it's yesilf as knows more about it thin iver I do. I'll not dispute yez."

Down the great river floated the Electric Cab.

The doors and windows were kept well guarded, for it was not known at what moment hostile demonstration might be made from the shore.

The ugly red spiders had deserted the cab before it went into the water, and there was no longer anything to be feared from them.

A sharp lookout was kept ahead, for Frank expected at any moment to come upon the canoes of Ventura and his party.

But nightfall came and nothing was seen of them.

It was possible to proceed after dark, but Frank decided not to do so.

He drew the Cab into a little bay or cove where the water was still and anchored it.

The search-light's rays shot across the rolling waters of the Amazon and up into the green foliage of the forest.

Great river snakes swam silently around the hull of the Cab. Barney and Pomp who were on watch regarded them with aversion.

"Begorra, I'd niver want to take a shwim in these wathers!" said Barney, "thim devils wud soon swallow ye!"

"Yo' am right, Pish," declared Pomp. "Huh! hi dar! Wha' am dat?"

Both gave a mighty start. A monster night bird had sailed down and alighted upon the bow of the Cab.

It was the strangest looking creature they had ever seen, and emitted a croak which was like the voice from some tomb.

"Massy sakes!" exclaimed Pomp. "Wha' sort ob a debbil bird am dat? I don' like de looks ob him at all."

"Begorra, we'll soon foind out!" exclaimed Barney, catching up his rifle.

But before he could open a loophole to fire through the big bird flew away.

Then came a shower of bats against the windows. They were of all sizes, from the vampire down.

They were attracted no doubt by the electric light, and so numerous did they become that it was finally deemed necessary to shut off the light.

There was little use now in keeping watch, for neither Barney nor Pomp could see across the sill of the pilot house windows.

It seemed as if the night was interminable, and would never come to an end.

The break of day in the east was warmly welcomed. Frank was astir early and a start was made.

Soon the swampy tracts began to disappear behind them and the river banks narrow.

A dull thunderous roar from the distance below told Frank of a new danger.

"It is a cataract," he said.

Of course it would have been folly to attempt to send the Electric Cab down over the cataract.

There was but one thing to do, and this was to take to the Selvas again.

So the head of the Cab was turned to the shore. A good landing place was selected.

Then it was run up the bank and once more beneath the arches of the forest.

And just as this was done, Frank caught sight of moving forms through the trees.

He strained his gaze at this, and was at once rewarded with a most gratifying discovery.

CHAPTER XI.

LESLIE'S FAITH.

"On my word," he cried. "There they are!"

"Who am dat?" shouted Pomp.

Then Barney threw his cap in the air, and cried:

"Begorra it's the very wans we are lukin' for, to be shure! It's Misster Leslie and his min!"

Through the forest arches there were marching a line of men. They carried light canoes upon their shoulders.

In their van walked a young man with sunburned, anxious face. There was no doubting it. It was Leslie Ventura.

The meeting was for a moment a joyous one.

"Well," cried Leslie, with bright face, "we have made good progress, have we not? The Javarri River is not far above us. I am sure we shall learn something of the missing men there."

There was a grave expression upon Frank's face, and it was hard for him to break the sad news to this hopeful youth.

But he knew that it must be done, and he was the only one to assume the painful duty.

So he did not hesitate.

"Come aside, Leslie," he said. "I want to speak with you."

For a moment the youth's face paled. But he followed Frank.

The young inventor turned and took Leslie's hand.

"My friend," he said, "I want you to bear up bravely under what I have to tell you—to be sure you are not unprepared."

"W—what?" gasped the young scientist. "You—you mean my father?"

"Yes."

"Well—is he—he—"

"He is dead."

For a moment Leslie reeled and seemed about to fall. Then he drew a shuddering breath, and a light of incredulity came into his eyes.

He leaned forward and whispered hoarsely:

"Are you sure of that?"

"Very sure," replied Frank.

"Did—you see his body?"

"We found the remains of both."

Leslie gave a gasping cry and a wail of anguish.

"Oh, my dream, my dream!" he cried. "I was sure it would be verified. Let me tell you of my dream. I thought that my father was restored to me. It was as vivid as life. I have believed in it very devoutly. And—you are sure?"

"I am compelled to say yes!" said Frank, sadly.

To his surprise Ventura laughed bitterly.

"I cannot believe it," he said. "I must first see my father's remains. Where did you find them?"

Frank then described the finding of the two skeletons. Also, he depicted the experience with the deadly negas, and how foolhardy it would be for anyone to venture thither.

Leslie listened like one to a fairy tale.

When Frank had finished he drew a deep breath and said:

"Do not feel hard toward me, Mr. Reade. But I cannot believe that the bones you found were those of my father. There might be a mistake you know. My dream was so vivid—so real that it has made a powerful impression on me. I must keep up the search."

"Ah, I fear it will only cost you your life."

"My life I will freely give. But I cannot ask you, of course, to sacrifice more for me. Your kindness—"

"I would gladly continue the search if there was the shadow of a doubt that your father is dead," said Frank.

They returned to the Electric Cab.

Frank speedily found that Ventura was in earnest.

Really, he felt a keen sense of sympathy for the young man, and could not well bear to think of his going further into the selvas in pursuit of what he considered a foolish undertaking.

In his mind there was not the slightest doubt that the remains found in the negas' country were those of the lost scientists.

It did not seem to him that better proof could be adduced.

In that case, what folly it seemed to pursue the quest further.

He had full sympathy for Leslie, but he deprecated his lack of judgment and apparent good sense.

"It seems as if he ought to know better," he reflected, and then was half resolved to approach him again and argue further on the subject.

But he saw the futility of this; the youth was very resolute.

In view of all these facts Frank was plunged into a quandary. He did not know what to do.

He felt that it would be almost criminal to go away and leave Leslie to pursue his quest alone.

On the other hand he was loath to spend further time in what appeared to be so foolish a quest.

So, taken altogether, Frank was decidedly in a pickle.

He went aboard the Cab and tried to think what it was best to do.

In the meantime Leslie had prepared to undertake his trip further into the interior.

But before going he came up to Frank, and said:

"I want to thank you, Mr. Reade, for your extreme kindness. I trust you will have a happy and successful trip home."

Frank hesitated a moment, and then said earnestly:

"Will nothing dissuade you, Leslie?"

"Why should I be dissuaded?" said the youth. "Am I not fulfilling my sacred duty?"

"Ah," said Frank, "but your father is dead, Leslie."

"That I cannot believe."

"Will you believe it if I take you to the spot where your father's bones were found by us?"

The youth hesitated.

"If you can satisfy me that they are the remains of my father, I will abandon the quest at once and return home with you."

"It is a bargain," said Frank, "but—"

"What?"

"You cannot take your men with you."

"Why not?"

"They will not return alive. The scarlet negas will pick their bones clean."

"What shall I do with them?" he asked in some perplexity.

"Leave them encamped here until you return."

"It is done!" cried Leslie. "I will go with you aboard the Cab." The Sequinas were given their instructions and went into camp. Then the Cab made its start.

Frank had decided to return to the negas' country the same way he had come—namely by water.

So the Cab ran out into the river, the paddle wheels were set and the start was made.

It was slow work paddling up against the current. But gradually the Cab made its way.

It required two days hard fighting against the current to reach the negas' country.

When the rugged vine-clad hills came to view, it was the morning of the third day.

With curious sensations the landing was made. The Electric Cab made its way along the foot of the hills.

As in the first visit not a sign of the deadly giant spiders could be seen.

If they were in the vicinity they were well hidden. The Cab made its way rapidly around the hill to the field of bones.

The sight here revealed caused young Ventura a shiver.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, "it looks like a charnal house!"

"And so it is," said Frank. "Ah, see that."

A huge hawk sailed down into the center of the field. But it had barely touched the ground when several scarlet objects darted from no one knew whither.

The hawk essayed to rise, but did not reach a height of ten feet.

The deadly poison had acted almost immediately. In a very short time nothing was left of the bird but its bones.

"Mercy on us!" gasped Leslie, "that is terrible."

The Cab now approached the spot on the verge of the plain where the supposed skeletons of the lost scientists were.

They yet lay at the foot of the eucalyptus.

The rifle with its shivered butt and the remnants of wearing apparel were yet there. Frank called Leslie's attention to them.

With dilated eyes the young scientist studied the skeletons from the pilot-house window.

Then he drew a deep, gasping breath.

"My dream will come true," he cried. "Neither of those skeletons is my father's."

"How do you know that?" asked Frank, in surprise.

"It is very easy to see. My father was abnormally short in stature, being hardly five feet. These men were large men and full six feet in height."

"Great Scott!" exclaimed Frank, "is that so?"

"It is true."

"But—how do you account for the remains of clothing and the marked rifle?"

"Easy enough. One of these men may have been Goggles. The other is doubtless a native. My father probably escaped."

For a moment Frank was stunned with the force of this theory. He could not help but admire the persistence and pluck of Leslie.

"You are a trump!" he exclaimed; "if your theory is verified and you really find your father alive—"

"Oh, I shall do that. I know that I shall!"

"I hope you will!"

"I have a plan to propose."

"Well?"

"Let us go home by another route, or through the Selvas. We might find a clew."

"It shall be done!"

Accordingly a route was chosen through the Selvas.

This would mean a long detour, but as Leslie had said, it might be productive of some new discovery.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FATE OF THE CAB—THE END.

THE Cab found much difficulty in forcing a way through the dense jungle now.

But a long detour was made, avoiding the impenetrable woods.

For hours the Cab kept on at a slow pace. A good watch was kept on all sides for a sign of a trail or an abandoned habitation.

Being out of the negas' country now, it was safe to venture out on deck, which was done.

Leslie walked up and down excitedly.

But as they were passing a dense coppice this act came near costing him his life.

He heard a hissing cry and felt a shock.

A long, slender dart had struck his cap and carried it from his head.

Had it caused an abrasion of the skin the wound would have been a fatal one, as the dart was poisoned.

In an instant Leslie was inside the Cab.

The affair had been seen by the others, and Barney instantly stopped the Cab.

"Begorra," he cried, "it looks like a chance for fun. Shure, it wud seem good to see even a native in these parts."

"Get your rifles all!" cried Frank. "Screen the loop-holes!"

There was more than one of the foes in the coppice, as was quickly proved.

Out from the foliage came another shower of darts.

They rattled harmlessly against the netting.

Then our friends began to retaliate. They fired rapidly into the bushes. Thus far not one of the natives had been seen.

But now fully half a hundred of them rushed forth.

With wild yells, and brandishing axes and clubs, they came down for the Cab.

At first, Frank was inclined to look with alarm upon their coming aboard. But he saw that they could do little harm with the weapons which they had.

While the Winchesters were worked with such deadly effect that very soon they were forced to flee.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, with the flush of victory; "bad cess to the devils! I reckon we give them enough this toime!"

The natives did not return to the attack. They slunk away into the forest, evidently satisfied that they were not a match for the white man and his wonderful inventions.

Victory had certainly sided with the explorers. But the incident was not yet terminated.

Frank had given Barney the order to go ahead, when a strange cry was heard and a nondescript form dropped down upon the roof of the Cab.

It was a man, and a white man also.

But such a spectacle as he was. Hatless and shoeless. White and haggard and bleeding from many wounds. So exhausted was he, that his voice was only a horrible whine.

"God be praised! I have met countrymen of mine at last."

"Mercy on us!" gasped Frank; "who is that?"

But Leslie Ventura had been fixedly regarding the nondescript forest wanderer, and now gave a wild shout.

"It is—it is!" he shouted—"my father! My dream has come true! Heaven be praised!"

In another moment he sprang upon the forest wanderer and clasped him in his arms.

It was indeed Juan Ventura.

His story was quickly told.

The bones found under the eucalyptus were those of Malcom Gogles and a native who had been their companion in all their wanderings.

Ventura had escaped from the negas by the closest sort of a chance.

Since then he had been aimlessly wandering about alone.

He had made a vain search for the Amazon. Once he should reach it he would build a raft, and floating down stream by night would eventually make his way to civilization.

But fate stood against him.

His best efforts were naught. He subsisted upon berries and barks. He was night at the point of starvation when this band of natives had given him chase.

He managed to elude them and secreted himself in the foliage of a tree, from whence he had dropped to the deck of the Cab.

This was his story in its entirety. The joy of the reunion of father and son cannot be expressed in words.

They embraced each other again and again.

There was nothing more to be wished for, and Leslie cried:

"Now let us get out of this land of deadly pitfalls and snares. We must go home."

"It will be a joy to see home once more," said Dr. Ventura.

"You would never have seen it but for the pluck and persistence of your son," said Frank.

"No, we owe all to Frank Reade, Jr., and the Electric Cab," said Leslie, happily.

The Cab once more set forth upon its course to the Amazon. But it was destined never to reach it.

The band of natives who had been so signally repulsed were not without a spirit of revenge.

And this they set forth to execute in a characteristic manner.

The first appraisal our adventurers had of their purpose was in a thrilling form. Suddenly the nostrils of all were assailed with a peculiar odor.

"There is a fire somewhere!" cried Frank. "I smell smoke."

Then all eyes swept the arches of the forest. In their rear the red glare was seen.

A dull roaring arose as the fire swept on through the tinder-like debris of the Selvas.

The effect of this upon our adventurers was thrilling indeed.

"On my word!" cried Leslie, "that is the work of those natives. They mean to cremate us."

With ghastly faces all looked at the madly gathering flames.

The progress of the Electric Cab was necessarily slow. The fire would be sure to overtake it.

To add to the desperateness of the situation, they now came to an impenetrable part of the forest. The Cab could go no further.

To make a detour was to rush right into the flames. For a moment the adventurers gave themselves up for lost.

"Heaven help us!" cried Frank Reade, Jr. "We shall never get out of this alive!"

"Then let us die bravely!" said Doctor Ventura, grimly. "Death has no horrors for me now."

"We will not talk of death now," said Leslie; "is there no way of escape?"

"There is but one thing we can do," said Frank.

"Well?"

"We have got to abandon the Cab."

"But will not the fire overtake us as quickly?"

"No. I do not think it will go further than this impenetrable district," declared Frank; "there is no combustible material for it beyond, for damp mosses cover the ground and pools of water, while the trees are very green and damp. We must take to the impenetrable woods to save our lives."

This was clearly the truth; there was no other alternative. It was too late to set counter-fires.

The forest fire was already within a quarter of a mile of the spot. It would soon be at hand.

There was no possible hope of saving the Cab. It was a fearful reflection that it must be sacrificed, but yet there was plainly no help for it.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Leslie; "you will lose your wonderful invention, Frank. It was a sorry day for you when you came into the Selvas."

"I am sorry to lose the Cab," said Frank, "but life is more precious. That we must preserve at all hazards. Take such effects as you desire and follow me."

With sad hearts they abandoned the Cab. They took a last look at the handsome vehicle.

Then they plunged into the depths of the thicker forest. A man could make his way through it, but not the Cab.

On they pressed for a long ways. But they could feel the heat of the fire even at that distance.

Suddenly they heard a terrific explosion. The ground shook as with an earthquake shock.

"Mercy on us!" cried Leslie. "What was that?"

Frank remembered the dynamite aboard the Cab, and said:

"That is the last of the Cab."

An instant spell of depression fell upon all. They trudged on in silence for hours.

Darkness came on, and camp was made.

It was an unpleasant experience warding off wild beasts all night. But day finally came and they went on again.

Fortunately Frank had the proper bearings to reach the Amazon. But the undertaking was a herculean one for that.

It was a full week later when they finally came out into the Sequina camp.

Juan Ventura had given out and was carried upon a litter.

All were nigh starvation, and it is hardly necessary to say that they hailed the big river with praise and thanksgiving.

Food was at once prepared for them by the faithful Sequinas, and after a few days' rest all recovered.

But the situation was yet by no means an extremely pleasant one.

They were full two thousand miles from Para, and in a country replete with a thousand perils.

The chances were even that they might reach home sound and well.

However, there was no other recourse but to start for home. So a big raft was constructed, as there were not canoes enough.

This raft was made strong enough to resist the action of the water and run the rapids, as was believed.

Upon it a small cabin was built, and it was made as comfortable as possible for the travelers.

It was a beautiful morning when the start was made.

The first rapids were soon reached and safely run. Then the raft floated on down the current.

Weeks drifted into months. It seemed an interminable ways to the mouth of this mighty river.

"Our folks at home will give us up for lost," said Frank.

"Indeed they will," said Juan Ventura, "but what a pity you have lost your Electric Cab. I feel that it is my fault."

"By no means!"

"I have wealth. I will gladly indemnify you for the loss."

"Not so," replied Frank, "I am wealthy myself, and it is not the intrinsic value of the Cab that I cared for at all."

"I shall never forget the service you have done me."

"I am glad to have been able to serve you."

"I suppose you will be glad to get back to your machine works in Readestown?"

"Indeed, yes!"

"Will you construct another Cab."

"I hardly think so," replied Frank. "I have a new idea in mind just now. I shall try that."

"I wish you success!"

"Thank you!"

"Heigho!" shouted Leslie at that moment. "A steamer!"

Around a bend of the big river a steamer glided. It slackened speed at sight of the raft.

It came alongside and was found to be a Brazilian Government Cutter. The captain, a polite man, very kindly offered to convey the party to Para.

The bargain was made.

Leslie rewarded his Sequina natives liberally and then took leave of them. Four days of steaming brought them to Para.

This brings our story of the Selvas to its close. Our adventurers were well received in Para and succeeded in getting a steamer to New York.

Home is indeed a magic word, and when Sandy Hook Lightship was sighted all were radiantly happy.

Perhaps the happiest of all were Leslie and his father. They were received at the wharf by a multitude of friends, and an ovation was given Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp.

But why protract matters? To be brief, Leslie and his father returned to their scientific studies, resolved never to tempt the dangers of the Selvas again.

Frank and Barney and Pomp returned to Readestown. There they are to-day.

But Frank as usual has a new project on hand. What it will develop we may learn in the near future. With this announcement, dear reader, we will beg leave to write Au revoir.

[THE END.]

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